



LOL: Texting gives license plate letters new meaning

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RALEIGH, N.C. – Mary Ann Hardee trains elementary school teachers to introduce computers and other technology to students, but she wasn't hip to the Internet-age significance of her new license plate — until she caught her teenage grandchildren giggling at it.

They told her the “WTF” letter combination on her plate is a popular but profane acronym used by many who send text messages.

It means “What the —.”

“Once it was revealed to me, I developed this real self consciousness,” said Hardee, 60, who lives in Fayetteville, N.C., and works at Fort Bragg. Especially when she drove to school or church.

It used to be DMV officials just worried about the vanity plates, paying close attention to applicants' requests to make sure they weren't trying to slip through something foul or raunchy.

But text messaging has added a new wrinkle, because it uses acronyms or phonics for words and phrases. Think LOL for Laughing Out Loud or NME for enemy. That means some combinations for standard plates can spell trouble for the DMV.

The WTF plate was issued last year, one of roughly 240 letter combinations used on more than 2 million standard-issue plates. Hardee contacted DMV officials in July. She eventually made her case to DMV Commissioner Bill Gore, who ordered that she receive a new plate at no charge, and then issued the same offer to the 9,998 others who received plates with that letter combination.

A few weeks ago, the DMV recalled plates that began with XXX, for obvious reasons.

Gore eyeballs the list of letter combinations for soon-to-be issued plates to avoid another miscue.

“So if one slips by,” Gore said, “I have to take full responsibility for it.”

A scan of the new list of three-letter combinations the DMV is using this year — matched up with the text message directory on netlingo.com - doesn't show any other potential embarrassments. YTB is pleasant enough (You're The Best) and YSK is nothing worse than judgmental (You Should Know).

Being in the safe-driving business though, the DMV might want to think twice about the combination ZZZ.